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# PROLOGUE AS LEGITIMATION: CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF JOHN 1:1-18\*

James F. McGrath

## Abstract

Recent scholarship on the Fourth Gospel has suggested that this document was produced by a Christian community which was involved in an intense conflict with a local synagogue, the focus of which was christology. This study attempts to relate the Johannine prologue to this context, using Berger and Luckmann's model of legitimation. John's christological portrait of Jesus in the prologue is best understood in terms of the author's use of traditions and imagery which were authoritative to both him and his opponents, in order to defend the legitimacy of his and his community's beliefs. By looking at the prologue from this perspective, our understanding of the development of the distinctive Johannine portrait of Jesus is enhanced.

## Conflict and Christology in the Fourth Gospel

If there are two conclusions concerning which there has been a growing consensus among Johannine scholars, these would have to be (1) that the Fourth Gospel was formed in a context of intense conflict between a group of Jewish Christians and the local synagogue of which they were a part (until they were excluded by the authorities), and (2) that a key issue in the conflict, if not the key issue, was christology<sup>1</sup>. However, when the question is raised as to the *origins* of the Johannine 'high' christology, which resulted in its expulsion from the synagogue, this consensus breaks down incredibly quickly into uncertainty and confusion. Innumerable suggestions have been made, some playing down the differences between John and the Synoptics, others regarding the differences as indicators that Johannine christology has been influenced by Samaritan or Gentile thought to a degree sufficient to have radically altered the Johannine

\* The author would like to thank Prof James Dunn and Dr. Stephen Barton for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> See especially J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979; John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, pp.166-181.

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Christians' understanding of who Jesus is<sup>2</sup>. More recently an alternative approach has been to regard the social setting of the Johannine community as explaining the distinctive Johannine christology<sup>3</sup>. Elsewhere I have argued that this latter approach appears to provide a plausible and satisfying explanation of Johannine christological development, doing justice to both its continuity with earlier Christian christology and its distinctiveness<sup>4</sup>. The sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann<sup>5</sup> have shown how the process of worldview-maintenance which they call 'legitimation' moves a community to defend its beliefs in response to new issues and new threats by developing them, drawing out new implications from them, and so on. This process, which again I have summarized elsewhere, would appear to provide a plausible explanation of what stimulated the distinctive developments in Johannine christology, thus offering a solution to this aspect of the Johannine puzzle.

In this study we shall be looking at the Johannine prologue from the perspective of Berger and Luckmann's model of legitimation. But before proceeding, there are certain preliminary matters that must be considered briefly. The prologue of John's Gospel has been the focus of much intense research and discussion, and there can be said to be much disagreement, but also significant agreement, on many issues related to its character and background.

## Background

Since Bultmann's 1925 article, "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prologs zum Johannesevangelium"<sup>6</sup>, it has become generally accepted that the essential background to the prologue is to be found in the realm of Jewish

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Mahwah: Paulist, 1979, pp.37-39; Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*, Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991. See the discussion in my article, "Change in Christology: New Testament Models and the Contemporary Task", forthcoming in *Irish Theological Quarterly*.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism", reprinted in *The Interpretation of John*, ed. John Ashton, Philadelphia: Fortress Press/London: SPCK, 1986, pp.141-173; Jerome Neyrey, *An Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social-Science Perspective*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988; Martyn, *op.cit.*; Robert Kysar, "Christology and Controversy: The Contributions of the Prologue of the Gospel of John to New Testament Christology and their Historical Setting", *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5 (1978), *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> See my forthcoming article cited above (n.2), as well as my "Going Up and Coming Down in Johannine Legitimation", forthcoming in *Neotestamentica* 31/1 (1997).

<sup>5</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1967, pp.122-127.

<sup>6</sup> In *EYKAPETHION. Festschrift für H. Gunkel*, ii, Göttingen, 1925: 3-26, an abridged translation is given in John Ashton (editor), *The Interpretation of John*, London: SPCK, 1986, pp.18-35.

Wisdom speculation<sup>7</sup>. That this is correct can be demonstrated from a careful comparison with Jewish wisdom texts, as has frequently been done<sup>8</sup>. The Johannine prologue also bears a close relationship to earlier Christian developments in the area of Wisdom christology, as also becomes apparent through a comparison of texts.

#### Character

Attempts to find a single term to express exactly the function which this section performs in the context of the entire Gospel have not yet yielded a generally-accepted term, apart from the one which we have been using throughout our discussion thus far: *prologue*. This term is not perfect, but if for no other reason than its general acceptance will do for our purposes<sup>9</sup>. More important for our purposes is the question of whether and to what extent John has used traditional material, such as a pre-Christian hymn to Wisdom or a Christian hymn, which he has subsequently edited in order to express his distinctive theology. The review of previous views on this subject which has recently been undertaken by Jürgen Habermann<sup>10</sup> shows just how varied are the conclusions which have been reached on this subject. However, there does not seem to be any doubt that the language of the prologue is poetic or hymnic in nature, rather than prose.

One conclusion which seems quite firm is that the sections of the prologue relating to John the Baptist (1:6-8,15) are not all of a piece with the rest of the prologue. In the view of some, the hymnic part of the prologue is earlier, and the author or redactor of the Gospel has added the references to the Baptist. However, more recently it has been argued<sup>11</sup> that the prose sections about the Baptist are earlier and were actually a part of the original Gospel, which were subsequently separated and woven into the fabric of the

<sup>7</sup> For contemporary upholders of a Wisdom background see Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, New York: Doubleday, 1966, pp.521-524; John Painter, "Christology and the History of the Johannine Community in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel", *NTS* 30 (1984), p.465; James Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, London: SCM Press, 1989, pp.241-244; C. A. Evans, *Word and Glory. On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (JSNTSup, 89), JSOT/Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, pp.83-94; Ashton, *Studying John. Approaches to the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp.6f.

<sup>8</sup> In light of the detailed lists of parallels which can be found in works such as C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, 1953, pp.274f and Evans, *op.cit.*, pp.83-94, it has not been deemed necessary to include such a display of parallels here.

<sup>9</sup> On this see further G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Dallas: Word, 1987, p.5; J. Habermann, *Präexistenzaussagen im Neuen Testament*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990, p.318.

<sup>10</sup> Habermann, *op.cit.*, 318-414 (eight pages (406-414) are needed simply to summarize, in chart form, the views set forth by scholars from Weiss in 1856 up until Hofius in 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. John Robinson, "The Relationship of the Prologue to the Gospel of St John", *Twelve More New Testament Studies*, (first published in *NTS* 9 (1962-3), pp.120-129), London: SCM Press, 1984, pp.71-74; Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976, p.76; R. T. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and its Predecessor*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, p.28

prologue when it was added to the Gospel. This latter option seems to be the more likely of the two. The key argument in favour of this position is the fact that John 1:19 presupposes that the identity of 'John' is already known, suggesting that the original Gospel contained material prior to 1:19. This is further supported by the parallels with the beginning of Mark's Gospel.

John Ashton has written in a recent study of the prologue, "Any exegesis that depends upon a precisely accurate reconstruction of the *Vorlage* is open to suspicion. This is not because such a reconstruction would be unhelpful, but because it is virtually unattainable. Not one of the many different versions that have been proposed compels assent, and few are immune from the charge of special pleading. In general most of the purely stylistic arguments advanced in favour of one version or other of the hymn are too subjective to command a wide following"<sup>12</sup>. In view of the difficulties involved in distinguishing with certainty different layers of the hymn (other than those pertaining to John the Baptist), our focus here will be primarily on how John is using traditional Wisdom language, on the relationship between his use of such language and its use in other documents which are clearly pre-Johannine, and on how the Johannine use of Wisdom motifs in the prologue might have been relevant to the conflict setting in which we have suggested it was written.

#### Structure

It will also be important for our discussion to assess the structure of the prologue. In recent times a number of scholars have argued that the prologue actually has the structure of a chiasm or inverted parallelism<sup>13</sup>. It appears almost certain that at the very least the beginning and end of the prologue form an *inclusio*<sup>14</sup> (the eternal place of the Word with God being paralleled by the place of the *μονογενής*<sup>15</sup> alongside God). However, the mediation of

<sup>12</sup> Ashton, *op.cit.*, p.6.

<sup>13</sup> So e.g. R. A. Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue", *NTS* 27 (1980), pp.1-31; M. E. Boismard, *Moïse ou Jésus. Essai de Christologie Johannique* (BETL, 84), Leuven University Press 1988, pp.97f; John W. Pryor, "Jesus and Israel in the Fourth Gospel - John 1.11", *NovT* 32/3 (1990), pp.201f; *id.*, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People*, Leicester: IVP, 1992, pp.9f; C. H. Talbert, *Reading John*, London: SPCK 1992, pp.66f; Mark Stibbe, *John*, JSOT/Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, *ad.loc.*

<sup>14</sup> So e.g. I. de la Potterie, "Structure du Prologue de Saint Jean", *NTS* 30 (1984), pp.373f; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Leicester: IVP, 1991, p.135; F. Manns, *L'Evangile de Jean à la lumière du Judaïsme* (SBFA,33), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1991, p.34. See also Brown, *Gospel*, p.36; Habermann, *op.cit.*, p.400.

<sup>15</sup> The reading *μονογενής θεός* is accepted by the 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* as the most likely original reading, primarily on the basis that the majority reading (*μονογενής υἱός*) is the more usual phrase and thus is the easier reading of the two. See further the discussions in R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John Volume 1*, Wellwood: Burns and Oates, 1968, pp.279f; D. A. Fennema, "John 1.18: 'God the Only Son'", *NTS* 31 (1985), pp.124-135; M. J. Harris, *Jesus as God. The New Testament Use of Theos in*



the Word or of Jesus in creation and salvation appear to parallel one another (v3,17), as do the references to the light coming into the world (v9) and the Word becoming flesh (v14). A further convincing argument in favour of this structure is the way the final author or redactor has inserted the material concerning John the Baptist in what appear to be corresponding sections of the prologue. It thus appears likely that the prologue is intended to reflect a downward-upward motion on the part of the Word, a move from eternal existence alongside God to a return to the Father's side.

The most important objection which has been raised against the suggestion that the prologue follows a chiasmic structure is the failure of such a structure to place at the centre the climactic verse, 'And the Word became flesh'.<sup>16</sup> Culpepper considers that both Käsemann and Bultmann must be incorrect in regarding v14 as the climax of the prologue, for in his view, "It would be strange indeed if the evangelist (or redactor) gave careful enough attention to the structure of the prologue to create a beautiful chiasm, but failed to place the phrase he was most intent on emphasizing at its centre".<sup>17</sup> Culpepper then devotes much effort to a discussion of what he considers the climax of the prologue, its central point or 'pivot', which refers to the giving of authority to become children of God.<sup>18</sup> In our view, Culpepper is on the whole correct in his delineation of the prologue's structure, but wrong in his conclusion about where the climactic point is to be found. For one scholar who is very knowledgeable concerning the use of parallelism in Middle Eastern societies, Kenneth Bailey, is of the view that the 'turning point' of an inverted parallelism or chiasm tends to be immediately *after* the centre. "Usually there is a 'point of turning' just past the center of the structure. The second half is not redundant. Rather it introduces some crucial new element that resolves or completes the first half".<sup>19</sup> This means that, in the case of the prologue, the 'turning point' would be the decisive verse, "The Word became

Reference to Jesus, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992, pp.74-92. See also, however, the arguments of Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup.69), JSOT/Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, pp 123f, who argues that the addition of *θεος* is a result of the temptation for scribes to make later doctrines of the church more explicit in the Bible (cf. n.40 below). If *θεος* is an original part of v18, this would make the parallelism with vv1-2 stronger, but the parallelism is still clear without it.

<sup>16</sup> This objection has been made most recently by Ashton, *op.cit.*, p.27.

<sup>17</sup> Culpepper, *op.cit.*, p 14. See also Boismard, *op.cit.*, p.100; Pryor, "Jesus and Israel", p.202.

<sup>18</sup> Culpepper, *op.cit.*, pp.17-31. This view concerning what is at the centre of the prologue's literary structure is one reason why de la Potterie rejects a concentric structure (*op.cit.*, p.356). None of his objections really applies to the structure and reading proposed here.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (combined edition), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, p.50.

flesh...", even though the structural centre of the prologue is to be located in the area of vv12-13.<sup>20</sup>

Talbert's version of the prologue's structure is as follows:<sup>21</sup>

- A (vv1-5): The relation of the Logos to God, creation, humans
- B (vv6-8): The witness of John the Baptist
- C (vv9-11): The coming of the light/Logos and his rejection
- D (vv12-13): The benefits of belief in the Logos
- C' (v14): The coming of the Logos and his reception
- B' (v15): The witness of John the Baptist
- A' (vv16-18): The relation of the Logos to humans, re-creation, God

The structures proposed by Boismard<sup>22</sup> and Culpepper<sup>23</sup> are essentially the same as this, although they distinguish parallels in greater detail in certain sections. For example, both agree in making a further distinction in the area Talbert denotes as A and A', regarding vv1-2 as parallel to v18, v3 as parallel to v17, and vv4-5 as parallel to v16. In this they may very well be correct, and at the very least the parallels between vv1-2 and v18 are sufficient to merit their treatment as a separate section<sup>24</sup>. For our purposes, the overall outline proposed by Talbert will be sufficient, although it is recognized that further delineation of more detailed parallels may be possible.

We may now move on to a consideration of the prologue against the background of the Johannine conflict setting, the community's need to engage in legitimation/apologetic, and of the pre-Johannine traditions inherited by the community. Verses which parallel one another in the prologue will be treated together, since there is usually in chiasm, as in all parallelism, something significant to be learned from relating parallel terms or statements to one another.

<sup>20</sup> If this is correct, then it is quite plausible that the first half of the prologue refers primarily to the activity of the pre-existent Logos, although Ashton (*op.cit.*, ch.1) is certainly correct in his view that no Christian could read the prologue without thinking of the figure of Jesus throughout. It also answers de la Potterie's objection that the proposed structure is 'statique', the second part adding nothing to the first (*op.cit.*, p.356).

<sup>21</sup> Talbert, *op.cit.*, p.66; see also Pryor, *op.cit.*, p.202.

<sup>22</sup> See Boismard, *op.cit.*, p.98.

<sup>23</sup> See Culpepper, *op.cit.*, p.16.

<sup>24</sup> I am less certain of Culpepper's distinction in the central section (Talbert's D) between v12a and v12c, which he regards as parallel, and v12b, which he considers to form the true centre. It is not that the structure discerned by Culpepper is not there, but simply that the whole of v12 is linked together to such an extent that it should be treated as a whole rather than being further divided in the way Culpepper suggests.

vv1-2) The first verse of the Fourth Gospel takes up the opening words of Genesis (1:1), "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"<sup>25</sup>. John's decision to begin his Gospel in this way<sup>26</sup> needs to be explained, since in no other New Testament document which can be dated earlier than the Fourth Gospel with any degree of certainty is the story of Jesus introduced with a comparable affirmation of pre-existence<sup>27</sup>. John is also frequently regarded as distinctive in his use of Logos rather than Sophia to refer to the pre-existent Christ. This is not entirely correct: the only actual reference to Jesus as Sophia in the New Testament is found in 1 Corinthians 1:24, which does not appear in the context of the hymnic language which is generally recognized as typical of the Wisdom hymns. There is thus no reason to believe that the pre-existent one who became incarnate in Christ had already been exclusively identified with Sophia, as opposed to say Logos or Pneuma, and it is thus possible that John is not making any significant replacement or change to the tradition, but rather is simply using one of several possible alternative terms available to him<sup>28</sup>. His choice of Logos is probably due, not to the fact that it is masculine in contrast to feminine Sophia, but to the fact that Genesis 1, to which the author is alluding, refers to God speaking, and thus by implication to the Word of God.

What significance would introducing the Gospel with these words from the beginning of the Torah (and of the whole Hebrew Bible) have had in the context of the Johannine Christians' conflict setting? Firstly, it would provide a definite sense of continuity with traditional Jewish beliefs. The author clearly intends to link the coming of Jesus Christ and the existence of Christianity with the very beginnings of God's plan, as well as with the revelation and creative and saving acts of God recorded in the Old Testament. This would be extremely important in the context of a worldview

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Lindars, *op. cit.*, p. 82; Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (JSNTSup, 71), JSOT/Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, p. 95; and Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press/Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994, p. 284 note the relationship with not only Gen. 1:1, but also Prov. 8:22 and other parts of the wisdom corpus.

<sup>26</sup> Even if John is here using an already existing hymn, we must still explain the author's choice of this hymn for use as an introduction to his Gospel.

<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that John's introduction bears no resemblance to the introductions to the other Gospels. For the parallels and similarities between the opening sections of John and Mark in particular, see Morna Hooker, "The Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret", *NTS* 21 (1974), pp. 40-58.

<sup>28</sup> Scott (*op. cit.*, p. 94) points out that "by the time of the writing of the Fourth Gospel the concepts Logos and Sophia had become more or less synonymous in at least some areas of Jewish thought". See also G. Schimanowski, *Weisheit und Messias. Die jüdischen Voraussetzungen der urchristlichen Präexistenzchristologie* (WUNT: Reihe 2, 17), Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1985, pp. 75-77; Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 266; Talben, "'And the Word Became Flesh'. When?", in *The Future of Christology. Essays in Honor of Leander E. Keck*, ed. Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne A. Meeks, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, pp. 45f.

in which it was generally accepted that that which is older is original, more authentic and thus more highly valued<sup>29</sup>.

Another significant factor which may have influenced the author of this verse to use 'Word' rather than 'Wisdom' or any of the other alternatives may have been the use of the term 'Word' (Greek *λογος*, Aramaic *Mēmra*) in Jewish thought. This use of 'Word', attested to in the works of Philo and in the Targums, is parallel to the use of Wisdom, but is significantly different in that the Word is frequently used for appearances of God in the Old Testament, and on the whole is more definitely identified as being none other than God himself. Further, as is frequently noted by scholars, there is no clear statement to the effect that 'Wisdom was God' to be found in Jewish literature of this period<sup>30</sup>, whereas in Philo the Logos is clearly identified as *θεος* (not as *ὁ θεος*) just as it is in John.<sup>31</sup> In the context of the debate over the relationship between christology and monotheism, the identification of Jesus as the *Word* made flesh (as opposed to *Wisdom* made flesh) would bear more weight as a justification of the exalted status attributed to Jesus and the honour given to him.

Before proceeding, some justification should be given to our use of the term *Mēmra* ('Word') and of similar targumic terminology in our exegesis of the Johannine prologue, since C. K. Barrett's view that "*Memra* is a blind alley in the study of the biblical background of John's logos doctrine"<sup>32</sup> is an opinion shared by numerous other scholars. The main reason which he gives for his conclusion is the fact that *Mēmra* "was not truly a hypostasis but a means of speaking about God without using his name, and thus a means of avoiding the numerous anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament"<sup>33</sup>, whereas presumably in his view figures such as Wisdom or Philo's *λογος* were genuine hypostases<sup>34</sup>. However, such a conclusion is clearly questionable in the light of much of the recent research which has been undertaken in these areas. In particular, we may note the view of Dunn, who, after a discussion of Jewish texts relating to Wisdom, concludes that "the Hellenistic Judaism of the LXX did not think of Wisdom as a 'hypostasis' or 'intermediary being' any more than did the OT writers and the rabbis. Wisdom, like the name, the

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Philip Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 212-215.

<sup>30</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1978<sup>2</sup>, p. 155 regards Wisd. 7:25 as perhaps the closest that anything from this period comes to such a statement.

<sup>31</sup> *Somn.* 1.39 §230; *Qu. Gen.* 2.62. The Logos is also called 'divine' (*θειος*) in *Fug.* 18 §97; 19 §101; *Qu. Ex.* 2.68; *Op. Mund.* 5 §20; *Migr. Abr.* 31 §174.

<sup>32</sup> Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 153. See also the viewpoints of other scholars quoted by M. McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972, p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>34</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 153f.

glory, the Spirit of Yahweh, was a way of asserting God's nearness, his involvement with his world, his concern for his people<sup>35</sup>. It is a personification and is not conceived of as a separate entity alongside God. The same is true of Philo's *λογος*<sup>36</sup>. There is thus a growing number of scholars who are of the view that Raymond Brown's view of the Aramaic *Mēmra*, that it was "not a personification, but...a buffer for divine transcendence...a paraphrase for God in his dealings with men"<sup>37</sup>, would apply equally well to other figures such as Wisdom or Logos. Perhaps the key reason for the differences between the use of *Mēmra* in the Targums on the one hand, and the use of Wisdom or Word in the wisdom literature and Philo on the other, is the difference of genre. It is only when Philo discusses the concept of the *λογος* that he makes assertions about it being a 'second god' and the like. However, when the Logos appears in Philo's accounts of stories from the Jewish Scriptures, it functions in a way that is very similar to and reminiscent of the Targumic *Mēmra*. In the case of all these figures, we only find ourselves dealing with something which is more than a metaphor, with a real being clearly separate from God, in the later stages of the specifically Christian developments which identify these 'figures' with Jesus Christ.

v18) The statement that Jesus, now exalted to the right hand of God<sup>38</sup>, is the one who is able to make God known<sup>39</sup>, parallels the opening statements

<sup>35</sup> Dunn, *op.cit.*, p.176. His treatment of the Jewish wisdom texts is found on pp.168-176. See also John F. Balchin, "Paul, Wisdom and Christ", in *Christ the Lord. Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon, Leicester: IVP, 1982, pp.207f, who warns against reading later Christian trinitarian doctrine back into the Jewish Wisdom literature.

<sup>36</sup> See Dunn's discussion, *op.cit.*, pp.215-230. See also the discussion of Wisdom and Logos in Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, London: SCM Press, 1988:ch.2.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p.524. That this was the intended function of *Mēmra* becomes clear from the texts cited by McNamara, *op.cit.*, p.98. This can also be seen from the view expressed by R. Judah ben Ilai (2nd cent. C.E.) as a principle of translation: "He who translates a verse literally is a liar, and he who adds to it is a blasphemer" (*Tos.Meg.* 4.41; *b.Kiddushin* 49a). To illustrate the point he adduces Ex.24:10, and says that to render literally is to lie, because no one can be said to have seen God, but to add 'angel' is to blaspheme, and substitute a creature for the Creator. The proper rendering according to R. Judah is: 'They saw the glory of the God of Israel', which is substantially how the text is rendered in all the Targums (The version of this saying cited by Dunn, *op.cit.*, pp.130f is given without reference, but is most likely a later form, since it may well be concerned with the specifically Christian arguments from Scripture for Trinitarian doctrine). This reference, and that found in *Meg.* 4.9, are also significant inasmuch as they show that Targumic traditions relevant to our discussion were already current by the second century C.E. at the latest.

<sup>38</sup> 'In the bosom of' means 'seated (in the place of honour) alongside', as can be seen from John 13:23 and Luke 16:22f. Beasley-Murray, *op.cit.*, p.4, is of the view that the prologue does not end with the exaltation of the redeemer, in contrast with most other New Testament hymns, and this is one reason why he does not accept Culpepper's proposal concerning its chiasmic

concerning the Word alongside God 'in the beginning'. Immediately in v18 we are confronted with a number of points, all of which are significant for our study. Firstly, we have the assertion that no one (apart from the *μονογενής*<sup>40</sup>, as is soon clarified) has ever seen God, a statement which is widely recognized as polemical. Then, we have a reference to the exalted place of Jesus, which we know from several passages later on in the Gospel was problematic for many Jews. Lastly, we have a reference to Jesus as the revealer of God. We shall treat each of these points in turn.

The assertion that no one has ever seen God clearly evokes reminiscences of the Old Testament<sup>41</sup>. In the Old Testament, although there are a number of ambiguous incidents, there is a clear teaching that no one could see God and live. This is true even of Moses<sup>42</sup>, who is described as having spoken to God 'face to face'. Thus, on the one hand, the author of the prologue expresses his acceptance of this important tenet of Jewish belief, that no one has seen God. Yet on the other hand, the author emphasizes that the *μονογενής* - the Logos who was with God in the beginning, and who has now 'become flesh' - shares an incomparably intimate relationship with God, and thus can make God known in a way that no one who does not share this relationship (which means, effectively, no one else at all) is able to<sup>43</sup>.

structure. However, it is unlikely that any early Christian, hearing a reference to the Son 'at the Father's side', could fail to think of the present exalted place of Jesus. See further Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, p.225. Although the cross is not mentioned in the Prologue, this does not necessarily mean that John has no real place for the suffering and humiliation of Jesus, nor that the Prologue does not end with the post-resurrection exaltation of Jesus (*contra* Kysar, *op.cit.*, pp.352f).

<sup>39</sup> The recent argument of I. de la Potterie ("«C'est lui qui a ouvert la voie». La finale du prologue johannique", *Biblica* 69 (1988), pp.340-370) that *εξηγησάτο* used without a predicate bears more naturally the sense of 'opening the way' has failed to convince the present author, not because of any lack in de la Potterie's lexicographic arguments, but because he has failed to make sense of the phrase in its context in the prologue. The reference to no one having seen God seems to anticipate a reference to revelation. At any rate, if the meaning is that the *μονογενής* has opened the way for people to see God in and through Jesus Christ, then this is still essentially a reference to the revelation which Jesus brought and thus does not significantly affect our discussion.

<sup>40</sup> Davies (*op.cit.*, pp.123f) suggests that 'the Only One' (without 'Son' or 'God'), a reading which is found in one Vulgate manuscript, in the Diatesseron, in Origen, and in the writings of some other church fathers, is the original reading in John 1.18. She argues that the other readings arise from the temptation to make explicit in the Prologue of John the later doctrines of the church. The addition of either 'God' or 'Son' is explicable as a further explanation of the text whereas it is difficult to imagine why either word would be dropped. It also makes sense in the Johannine context, taking up the reference of 1.14. Nowhere else in John is 'God' contrasted with 'Father'.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Brown, *op.cit.*, pp.35f; Lindars, *op.cit.*, p.98; Barrett, *op.cit.*, p.169; Beasley-Murray, *op.cit.*, p.15; Carson, *op.cit.*, p.134.

<sup>42</sup> For the view that there is an implied contrast with Moses here, see Hooker, *op.cit.*, p.54.

<sup>43</sup> The Logos as 'God revealed' is particularly close to Philo's thought

The reference to Jesus 'in the bosom of the Father', or, in other words, at God's right hand, is a reference to the exalted status of Jesus, as we have already pointed out. The claim that Jesus had been exalted to a status alongside God was objectionable to many Jews even in the pre-Johannine period<sup>44</sup>. In the Johannine community at least, this came to be even more of a key issue, and one that provoked intense Jewish opposition. In this context, there is a clear significance to the fact that John parallels the pre-existent status of the Word with the exalted post-existent status of Jesus. It appears that the author would have us find the justification for the exalted status of Jesus in the eternal glory and position of the Logos. We have already noted in our discussion of the opening verses of the prologue how certain elements in the author's choice of expression would have relevance to any attempt to justify the attribution to Jesus of a status akin to that of God, and in light of the parallelism which exists between the beginning and end of the prologue, it would appear justified to assert that this was precisely what the author was concerned to do. Jesus may rightly occupy this exalted position, because the Word eternally occupied it, and Jesus is the person in and as whom the Word has 'become flesh'.

Also important in this verse is the reference to Jesus as the one who has made God known. This bears obvious relation to one of the key themes of the conflict between the Johannine Christians and the synagogue, namely the question of Jesus' qualifications to be the revealer. Since the reference is ostensibly to the exalted, post-resurrection Jesus, it could be suggested that Jesus is presented as being the revealer *precisely in his present exalted state*. However, the *αὐτὸς* tense *ἐξηγήσατο* makes clear that the author is thinking primarily (although perhaps not exclusively) of the ministry of the earthly Jesus: it was then that "we beheld his glory". In relation to this issue the parallel with the opening of the prologue is also relevant. Jesus is able to be the revealer because he is the incarnation of the pre-existent Word. In the Targums, it is frequently the Word (or alternatively the Spirit) who spoke to Moses<sup>45</sup>. The Word or Wisdom is also frequently identified with the Torah<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. the accusation of 'blasphemy' in the Synoptic trial accounts. See also the rabbinic account of the discussion involving R. Akiba concerning the plural 'thrones' in Dan. 7:9 in *b. Hag* 14a; *b. Sanh* 38b.

<sup>45</sup> Neofiti renders Num. 7:89 as "And when Moses used to go into the tent of meeting to speak with him, he used to hear the voice of the *Dibbēra* (Word) speaking with him...from between the two cherubim; from there the *Dibbēra* used to speak with him". Pseudo-Jonathan renders it: "And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with him, he heard the voice of the spirit [*qal rūha*] that conversed with him when it descended from the highest heavens above the mercy-seat, above the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and from there the *Dibbēra* conversed with him".

<sup>46</sup> See especially *Sir* 24 23, Bar 4.1.

Thus the one with whom Moses spoke, and whose will or wisdom was embodied in the revelation given to Moses, had now actually appeared on the scene as a human being<sup>47</sup>. The fact that the one who 'became flesh' in and as Jesus was one who shared in pre-existence with God also has direct relevance to the question of Jesus' qualifications as revealer. As we have noted earlier, in many streams of Jewish thought Moses was believed to have ascended to heaven in order to receive the Torah. In contrast to Moses' knowledge of heavenly things as at most a brief visitor to heaven, which was all that any human seer could ever hope to become, the Son has an eternal knowledge of God, which provides a basis for revelation far superior to that of any other.

vv3-5) In these verses, referring primarily to the pre-incarnate Logos' work in creation, we again find clear allusions to the role of Wisdom in many Jewish writings. A number of scholars have noted the important parallel which is to be found in 1QS 11:11<sup>48</sup>. This part of the Community Rule says of God, "All things come to pass by His knowledge; He establishes all things by His design and without Him nothing is done"<sup>49</sup>. If this verse gives us any insight into the meaning of John 1:3, then we should not render *γενεσθαι* as 'to create' but rather as 'to happen', as Ashton and several others have suggested. In favour of this suggestion is the fact that parallels in the Wisdom literature normally use the verb *κτιζω* to express creation, or alternatively *ποιεω*. However, this would be to choose between two equally valid renderings of a Greek word which may legitimately carry both meanings<sup>50</sup>. Given the parallels of language between this part of the prologue and so many instances in Jewish literature concerning Wisdom, where Wisdom is described as the mediatrix of creation, it would appear both unwise and unnecessary to exclude the idea of creation here. Perhaps this term was chosen because of its ambiguity, allowing the same phrase to refer to God's action of both creation and salvation<sup>51</sup>. In the Hebrew Bible, and much subsequent Jewish theology, the motifs and imagery of creation and

<sup>47</sup> The relationship between these two revelations will be discussed below in connection with vv16-17.

<sup>48</sup> T.E. Pollard, P. Lamarche, I. de la Potterie, and now John Ashton (*op.cit.*, p.19). See also the *Gospel of Truth* 37:21.

<sup>49</sup> Vermes' translation.

<sup>50</sup> As Ashton notes in connection with the question of whether 'Jews' or 'Judaeans' is a better rendering of the Greek *Ιουδαῖοι*, choosing between the two involves excluding a sense which is genuinely there in the Greek. Choosing either one is a falsification, and exposes the deficiencies of any language to carry the full meaning of words in another language (Ashton, *op.cit.*, pp 39,42).

<sup>51</sup> See Habermann, *op.cit.*, p.363.



salvation were inextricably linked<sup>52</sup>. This was also true of Christian theology prior to John, where we find a similar logic being followed through in connection with the christological use of Wisdom language. A prime example is the hymnic passage of Col.1:15-20, where Wisdom language is used to parallel the role of Christ in creation and in the new creation<sup>53</sup>. The working through of some of the logical implications of the role attributed to Christ by Christians in the restoration of God's plan for creation had apparently begun already in the pre-Johannine period.

In terms of the conflict setting we have posited, would these verses have had any particular relevance? The reference to the light shining in the darkness, but not being understood or overcome by it, is clearly intended to reflect the hostile reception which the Logos received in the world, even from 'his own'. The rejection of Jesus - the Logos incarnate - could not have been far from the author's mind. It is in no way problematic to suggest this, even if the view is taken that these verses refer primarily to the period before the incarnation<sup>54</sup>; in fact, it actually helps to show the relevance of these verses to the Johannine work of legitimation. In many places in the New Testament, Christian writers justify the failure of the Jews to believe, and to respond positively to Jesus or the early Christians, by pointing out the failure of Israel throughout its history to respond to God (or to his appointed prophets or leaders) as they should.<sup>55</sup> It seems likely that the references to light and darkness in the present verses are an attempt by the Fourth Evangelist to present the rejection of Jesus - and presumably also the Johannine community - in a similar way. The coming of God's Word into the world had from the very beginning of creation caused there to be a division, a separation between light and darkness<sup>56</sup>. Throughout Israel's history this pattern continued, with only a remnant remaining faithful to Yahweh, and

<sup>52</sup> For example, one may think of the exodus language, where language which traditionally related to the defeat of the sea monster at creation was taken up to refer to the 'defeat of the sea' in order for Israel to cross the Sea of Reeds and be redeemed. This influenced Israel's creation stories and hymns, which in turn influenced Second Isaiah's portrait of the return of Israel from exile as a 'second exodus' and 'new creation'.

<sup>53</sup> See the helpful discussion in G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1976, *ad loc.*

<sup>54</sup> As the present tense of *φαίνει* shows, the reference may be primarily to the period prior to the incarnation, but if so it does not refer exclusively to this period: the light continues to shine, and the darkness has still not understood or overcome it. Cf. Schnackenburg, *op.cit.*, pp.245-247; Beasley-Murray, *op.cit.*, p.11.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. Matthew 23:29-32, 37-39, Acts 7, 28:25-28; Romans 9:27-29.

<sup>56</sup> A non-Christian reader could here understand the reference to be (exclusively) to creation, whereas a Christian reader would think of the moral overtones of the light/darkness contrast and relate the language to events in salvation history. Carson (*op.cit.*, p.119) calls v5 "a masterpiece of planned ambiguity".

with many rejecting Wisdom.<sup>57</sup> John's language would be useful as a response to objections to the idea of Jesus being the Messiah or revealer made on the basis of the fact that the majority of the Jews had not accepted him as such: John (like many other Jewish and Christian authors in a similar context) pointed out that it had never been the majority which remained faithful and believed<sup>58</sup>.

vv16-17) These verses, which refer to the activity of the Logos in salvation history, appear to parallel vv3-5, a point which would seem to confirm our suggestion that the unity of creation and redemption is important for the author of the prologue<sup>59</sup>, as for many Jews and Jewish Christians. That the author believes that we have all received from the fullness of his grace is quite clear<sup>60</sup>. However, the relationship of this *χαρις* to another *χαρις*, described through the use of the preposition *ἀντὶ*, is much more ambiguous. There is increasing agreement that this phrase does not support the meaning which has often been attributed to it, namely 'grace upon grace'. The preposition *ἀντὶ* normally denotes the idea of 'replacement', and since what is being replaced is also described as 'grace', the idea must be something along the lines of 'one grace being replaced by another, even greater grace'<sup>61</sup>.

This difficult phrase should not be interpreted in isolation from the verse which follows, in which the giving of the Law through Moses is related to the appearance of grace and truth on the scene of human history through Jesus Christ.<sup>62</sup> The parallelism between Moses and Jesus here is frequently described as antithetic<sup>63</sup>. However, given the fact that Moses is a positive witness to Christ, and that the grace of the Old Testament period was genuine grace, the view of those scholars who feel that the contrast is between the 'giving' of grace in and through the Law and the 'coming' of

<sup>57</sup> See the earlier Jewish use of this idea in 1 Enoch 42:1-3; Bar.3:12.

<sup>58</sup> This point is also to the fore in v11. See our discussion below.

<sup>59</sup> Boismard (*op.cit.*, p.98) considers v3 and v17 to parallel one another, referring to these verses under the respective headings, "Rôle du Logos dans la création" and "Rôle de l'Unique-Engendré dans la re-création".

<sup>60</sup> Schnackenburg (*op.cit.*, p.275) rightly concludes that the term *πληρωμα* "has certainly nothing to do with Gnostic speculations on the plenoma...One is rather reminded of the quite ordinary expression in the O.T., 'the fullness' - of God's grace, Ps 5:8, of his graces, Ps 106:45, of his mercy, Ps 51:3; 69:17; so too 1QS 4:4, 'the fullness of his grace'".

<sup>61</sup> Ruth B. Edwards, "Χαριν ἀντὶ χάριτος (John 1.16). Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue", *JSNT* 32 (1988), pp.3-15. A useful discussion of the various possibilities is also found in Brown, *op.cit.*, p.15f.

<sup>62</sup> This is a further reason for our hesitation to accept the structural proposal of Culpepper and Boismard to separate these verses in their proposed chiasm.

<sup>63</sup> So e.g. Boismard, *op.cit.*, p.104.

grace as an actual human person, where both are genuinely the grace of God but the latter is a superior expression of that grace, appears a much more satisfactory understanding of the author's meaning.<sup>64</sup> Yet to speak of the parallelism as 'synthetic' may also be misleading, since there can be no doubt that a contrast is implied between the Mosaic dispensation and that of Jesus the Messiah. The author of the prologue would probably not have agreed with the view, expressed in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, that Moses and Jesus are equally bringers of salvation, the one for Jews, the other for Gentiles. Although there is no polemic against Torah observance, presumably because the Johannine Christians, as part of their local synagogue, had not had anything like the huge influx of Gentile converts which the Pauline churches experienced<sup>65</sup>, it would seem legitimate to conclude that the Johannine view is still in many ways closer to the Pauline view than to that of the *Homilies*: the Mosaic covenant was not valueless, but cannot be regarded in the same way once one has come to see the far surpassing glory manifested in Jesus Christ<sup>66</sup>. Belief in Moses is not contrasted with belief in Christ in the Fourth Gospel; rather, the one who has truly believed Moses should find it a natural step to believe in Jesus Christ. In the present passage a similar line of thought seems to be followed: we (primarily Jews) have experienced God's grace throughout history, and the only appropriate response is to respond to its fullest manifestation ever, which is to be found in the Word-become-flesh, Jesus Christ.

Before moving on, we may note that here too there is an implicit Wisdom allusion, inasmuch as Jesus Christ is identified with the one the fullness of whose grace was manifested in various ways in the Old

<sup>64</sup> So especially Schnackenburg, *op.cit.*, p.277; Davies, *op.cit.*, p.128. See also Brown, *op.cit.*, p.16; Kysar, *op.cit.*, p.359. Schnackenburg correctly notes that observance of the Law is never something negative in John, and Davies writes: "Since the law is characterized as God's grace, and since, later in the Gospel, teaching in the law is taken to be authoritative, no denigration can be intended". On the place of the Torah in Johannine Christianity, see the present author's "Johannine Christianity - Jewish Christianity?", in *Koinonia Journal* VIII.1 (Spring 1996). See also the discussion of S. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel. The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 42) Leiden. E. J. Brill, 1975. Painter (*op.cit.*, p.466) and Schnelle (*Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p.31) are guilty of reading Paulinism into the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>65</sup> Perhaps those Gentiles who did join the Johannine Christians had already been proselytes or God-fearers.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:6-18. However, the author of the Fourth Gospel would not have agreed with Paul's assessment of Torah in terms of the 'letter that kills'. It would probably be best to say that the Fourth Gospel occupies a place somewhere between the Pauline writings and the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, one similar perhaps to the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, and to avoid suggesting that the Fourth Gospel is much closer to one or the other. See my forthcoming study "Johannine Christianity - Jewish Christianity?" (n.64 above).

Testament and was expressed in the giving of the Law through Moses. As we have had occasion to note on several occasions, there are numerous passages from the intertestamental period which identify Wisdom and Torah<sup>67</sup>. The identification of Jesus as the one whose grace is expressed, albeit partially, in Torah, presents him as one who is superior to it, and who is thus to be taken with the utmost of seriousness.

vv6-8,15) In these verses we are confronted with the first mention of the person of John the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel, and as we have already seen, it is quite probable that these verses once stood as the opening of the Gospel<sup>68</sup>. It seems likely that there was at some stage in the community's history a debate with a continuing group of disciples of the Baptist. Although it is reasonable to relate the apparently polemical statement in v8 to such a setting, we have very little information upon which to reconstruct this conflict, and we have no way of knowing which side first claimed that its leader is 'the light'. In v15 we also have an explicit contrast between the Baptist and Jesus, and (as is frequently the case in the Fourth Gospel) the contrast is placed on the lips of John the Baptist himself.

The conflict with these followers of the Baptist was with another group which was probably of a size similar to or smaller than the Johannine Christians, whereas 'the Jews' represented the majority opinion in their community, and more importantly the opinions of its leaders<sup>69</sup>, and for this reason the controversy with the baptists has not left its mark on the present form of the Fourth Gospel to anything like the extent that the conflict with 'the Jews' has affected it<sup>70</sup>. Yet it is still important that such passages as these, which relate to controversy with the baptists over the relationship between Jesus and John, be considered, if for no other reason that they give another clear indication of the fact that the development and formation of

<sup>67</sup> In n.46 above we pointed to the particularly clear examples of Baruch 4:1; Sirach 24:23. See also Targum Neofiti to Deut.30:11-14 in relation to Baruch's use of the same passage in 3:29f; also note rabbinic passages such as *Sifre Deut.* on 11:10,§37; *Midr.Ber.R.* 1:1.4. Torah is also identified with light (see references in W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, London: SPCK, 1955<sup>2</sup>, p.148 n.2).

<sup>68</sup> See the discussion above.

<sup>69</sup> See the discussion in K. Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981; he writes of the Johannine community, "Sie lebt in einer national gemischten, aber von Juden dominierten Umwelt; das Judentum erscheint geradezu in behördlicher Machtstellung" (p.80). See also Kysar, *op.cit.*, p.359 for a suggestion on how these verses may have been relevant to the Johannine Christians' debate with their Jewish opponents.

<sup>70</sup> Of course, the debates about the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist may have influenced Johannine thought and beliefs in ways that are no longer known or accessible to us,<sup>71</sup> but to speculate further on this subject would not appear to add anything to our study

christological beliefs and categories often took place in the context of a contrast or comparison with another figure.

De la Potterie gives as one reason for rejecting the structure we have proposed for the prologue as the fact that the two halves of the structure are not really parallel, and the example which he gives is the difference tenses used of John's witness is vv6-8 (past) and v15 (present).<sup>71</sup> This can be explained, however, as being due to the fact that John thinks of the Baptist standing on the border, as it were, between two ages. If we are correct in our view that the Fourth Evangelist understood the incarnation to have taken place at Jesus' baptism,<sup>72</sup> then John can be said to have borne witness in both the pre-incarnation and post-incarnation periods. De la Potterie assumes that the coming of the Logos refers to the *birth* of Jesus, and thus has difficulty making sense of the Baptist's role in the prologue.<sup>73</sup> At any rate, it is perhaps unwise to make too much of the different tenses used to refer to the Baptist's testimony.

vv9-11) V9 may be read in two main ways: (a) "He was the true light, who lightens every man coming into the world"; (b) "The true light, that lightens every man, was coming into the world". Neither possibility is without difficulties, and both have parallels which may lend support to them. The reason for the ambiguity is that the participle ἐρχόμενον may be taken either with ἦν and φῶς to create a periphrastic construction, 'was coming', or with ἀνθρώπων. Modern commentators are almost unanimous in preferring reading (b)<sup>74</sup>. In favour of (a), there is the parallel which is found in *Lev.R.* 31:6, "Thou enlightenest those who are on high and those who are beneath and all who come into the world"<sup>75</sup>. Although the apparent incongruity with the phrase immediately preceding (οὐκ ἦν ἔκεινος το φῶς...Ἦν το φῶς) is an obvious difficulty, it is not impossible that the author or redactor did not notice that the ἦν which opens v9 would most naturally be taken to refer back to John the Baptist, especially if he was splicing together two sources, a proto-Gospel and a hymnic or poetic composition. However, if the majority opinion of commentators is correct, and the phrase is intended to be read as a periphrastic construction, then this construction should not be taken (as in English) to mean 'was (on the point of) entering', since the Greek

<sup>71</sup> de la Potterie, "Structure", p.356.

<sup>72</sup> On this point see our discussion of v14 below

<sup>73</sup> *op.cit.*, p.369

<sup>74</sup> So e.g. Barrett, Beasley-Murray, Brown, Carson, Lindars, Painter, Schnackenburg.

<sup>75</sup> Cited by Barrett, *op.cit.*, p.160, Dodd, *op.cit.*, p.204 n.1. Barrett and Beasley-Murray both note that 'all who come into the world' is frequently used in the rabbinic writings with the sense 'every man'. The fact that the phrase does not actually use the word 'man' (*ish*, ἀνθρώπων) does not weaken the parallel.

construction most naturally conveys the idea of a *continuous* action in the past, rather than a single, carefully-delineated action or event. The reference would then almost certainly not be to the single event of the incarnation<sup>76</sup>, but to the frequent comings of the light into the world throughout its history<sup>77</sup>. At any rate, as Beasley-Murray points out, both interpretations of the verse are possible, and would make sense at this juncture of the prologue, and thus it is difficult to come down firmly on the side of one or the other<sup>78</sup>. Ultimately, it is clear that the verse refers to the light, and that this true light illuminates every human being. If any factor is suggestive of a solution, it may be the fact that the parallel section of the prologue (v14) refers to the incarnation, the decisive coming of the Logos into the world.<sup>79</sup>

However, even if every human being has in some sense received life and light from the Logos, in another sense the majority of human beings have refused these things from him. The idea found in vv10-11 has parallels in both Jewish and pagan writers: Reason or Wisdom has been rejected by most people; Wisdom has not found a place to dwell. The reference in v10 to the κόσμος is intended to encompass a wider reference than τα ἰδιᾶ in v11: the former is the entirety of the world which came into existence through the mediation of the Logos, whereas the latter is clearly a reference to the Jewish nation and people, who were God's chosen ones<sup>80</sup>. Thus on the one hand John is accepting the Old Testament teaching that Israel is God's chosen people, while on the other hand subverting the way this teaching was understood by a great many people in his time. Israel had been chosen by God, but even so had not responded to God as they should have. John transposes the Wisdom myth in a fashion similar to a number of other sectarian and reform movements in early Judaism, so that we do not hear of Wisdom dwelling in Israel, but rather being rejected in Israel, although

<sup>76</sup> Contra Barrett, *op.cit.*, p.161. The other examples of periphrastic constructions cited by Pryor, *op.cit.*, p.204, appear to support our interpretation better than his.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Talbert, *Reading John*, p.69; Lindars, *op.cit.*, p.78. I am grateful to Eryl Rowlands for this point.

<sup>78</sup> Beasley-Murray, *op.cit.*, p.12.

<sup>79</sup> Talbert, *Reading John*, p.66 (see the outline of his proposed structure above); also Culpepper, *op.cit.*, pp.13f; Boismard, *op.cit.*, p.98. Culpepper and Painter (*op.cit.*, p.462) simply regard these as two references to the incarnation, which detracts somewhat from the climactic nature of v14, which as we have noted above adds something new to the second half of the prologue. On the Word as light, see also the discussion of Targum Neofiti to Exod 12:42 in McNamara 1972:104.

<sup>80</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p.10; Kysar, *op.cit.*, p.359. Other proposed suggestions are less convincing. For example, Pryor's view depends on the reference here already being to the Logos *incarnate* (*op.cit.*, pp.214-217). That John uses a different word than the LXX does not necessarily mean that he had a different concept in view.



accepted by some, both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>81</sup> In the context of the conflict which lies in the background of the Fourth Gospel, John seeks to communicate that, as so many Jews would acknowledge, Israel had frequently rejected Wisdom. By presenting Israel's rejection of Jesus as simply one example of this wider phenomenon, the suggestion that this rejection somehow discredits Jesus' claims is undermined.

v14) Over against a section which, however we translate v9, clearly refers to the rejection of the light by mankind as a whole and Israel in particular, in this verse we have a clear reference to the incarnation, and to the believing community ('we') which has welcomed the incarnate Word. The best rendering of the words *ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο* is probably that suggested by Barrett, 'the Word came on the (human) scene - as flesh, man'.<sup>82</sup> The point is that it is none other than the Wisdom or Word of God, the true light, which has appeared on the scene of human history in a decisive and distinctive way: as the man Christ Jesus. The identification between Jesus and the Word is important for various reasons which have already been mentioned.

This verse contains an almost overwhelming number of allusions to the Old Testament and Jewish traditions. The reference to 'tabernacling' is almost universally acknowledged to be an allusion to the wisdom tradition, such as is attested to in Sirach 24:8, where God commands Wisdom to pitch her tent in Israel.<sup>83</sup> The term also recalls the *Shekinah*,<sup>84</sup> and this, together with the appearance of the related terms *Word* (Aramaic *Mēmra*, *Dibbūra*) and *glory* (Aramaic *ʿeqar*, Hebrew *kabôd*), suggests that the author intends the reader to recall these Jewish traditions.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> On the Wisdom imagery underlying these verses see Talbert, *op.cit.*, p.72; Ashton, *op.cit.*, pp.7,15-17. The Johannine use of the motif appears to lie somewhere between the view that Wisdom was accessible to all and the view that Wisdom had found no dwelling on earth and so returned to heaven, where she was accessible only to a select few apocalyptic visionaries and mystics. For John, Wisdom appeared on earth in Jesus and has been made available to all, although the overall response to Wisdom's appearance was rejection. See further the parallels in 1 Enoch 42:2; Baruch 3:12 (cited Brown, *op.cit.*, p.523).

<sup>82</sup> Barrett, *op.cit.*, p.165. Although Barrett's rendering avoids certain connotations which are difficult to evade when using the traditional translation, in our discussion we will still use the phrase 'became/becoming flesh', since alternative phrases, if perhaps more accurately conveying what the author probably intended, are often so convoluted as to make their use awkward.

<sup>83</sup> For other OT parallels to this language see Brown, *op.cit.*, pp.32f.

<sup>84</sup> Not only do the roots of the two terms have essentially the same meaning, 'to dwell', but there is also a similarity of sound between the root *škn* and John's term *ἐσκηνοῶντες*.

<sup>85</sup> The accumulation of so many terms of this sort in such a small space is hardly likely to be coincidental. On these terms see McNamara, *op.cit.*, especially p.104. An Aramaic original has been proposed, on the basis of these similarities, by A Díez Macho ('El Logos y el Espiritu Santo', in *Atlántida* 1 (1963), p.389), who is cited by McNamara.

Here then, in what is recognized by most to be the climactic verse of the prologue<sup>86</sup>, we find Jesus identified as the embodiment of all of these aspects of God<sup>87</sup> as flesh, as a human life. We have already seen the importance of the parallelism between the beginning and end of the prologue for justifying Jesus' exalted status and ability to reveal God. Here at the climax of the prologue we are given the basis for that parallelism: the Word has 'become flesh', and is now to be identified with the human being Jesus.

An important question to ask is *when* the Word was believed to have appeared in human history as flesh. This is not to question that the author identified the Word-become-flesh as *Jesus*, but to ask whether there is a particular event in Jesus' life at which point this was understood to have actually come to pass. The traditional answer, and the one which seems most obvious, is of course Jesus' *conception* through the Holy Spirit. Yet its very apparentness should make us cautious. The Fourth Gospel nowhere indicates knowledge of the tradition that Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit. The Johannine account of the life of Jesus begins with the 'baptism' of Jesus<sup>88</sup>, and given the fact that terms like 'Spirit, Wisdom and Logos were all more or less synonymous ways of speaking of God's outreach to man'<sup>89</sup>, it has been suggested that a first-century reader of the Fourth Gospel would have understood the Word becoming flesh and the Spirit descending upon Jesus as descriptions of the same event<sup>90</sup>. This is significant, since there was

<sup>86</sup> We have already given our reasons for disagreeing with Culpepper's suggestion that the centre of the prologue must also be its climax.

<sup>87</sup> To call them 'attributes' would be too impersonal, whereas to call them 'figures' might imply that they exist as separate entities from God. The intentional ambiguity of the terms must be retained. As McNamara writes, "[T]he targumists...remove anthropomorphisms, substituting references to the 'Word' (*Memra*), 'Glory' (*Yeqara*, *ʿIqar*) or 'Presence' (*Shekinah*; Aramaic: *Shekinta*) of the Lord when speaking of his relations with the world. In communicating his will to man we read of 'the Holy Spirit' or the *Dibbera* (Word) rather than the Lord himself. For a Jew, of course, these were merely other ways of saying 'the Lord'. They were reverential ways of speaking about the God of Israel" (McNamara, *op.cit.*, p.98). Like Philo's *Logos*, these terms could be God or not God depending on what was felt to be theologically correct in a given context.

<sup>88</sup> This is clearly the setting in which the opening narratives and discourses of the Fourth Gospel take place, even if, presumably for polemical reasons, the author does not actually mention that Jesus was baptized by John. See my "Johannine Christianity" (n.63 above). The Johannine omission of reference to Jesus' baptism in water by John does not affect our present point, since John still recounts the coming of the Spirit.

<sup>89</sup> Dunn, *op.cit.*, p.266. See also n.28 above.

<sup>90</sup> See the more detailed arguments of Fuller, "The Incarnation in Historical Perspective", in *Theology and Culture. Essays in Honor of A.T.Mollegen and C.L.Stanley* (ATRSup, 7), ed. W. Taylor Stevenson, 1976, p.60; Francis Watson, "Is John's Christology Adoptionist?", in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament. Studies in Christology in Memory of G.B.Cavd*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, pp.113-124, Talbert, *op.cit.*, pp.74-77;

widespread agreement in Judaism, and unanimous agreement in Christianity, that the Messiah was a figure in whom God's Spirit was present a decisive way<sup>91</sup>. John could thus appeal to such traditions in order to support his claims concerning Jesus, by presenting Jesus as one so fully possessed by the Spirit or Word of God as to be wholly at one with it,<sup>92</sup> so that that which is attributed to the Logos may also legitimately be attributed to Jesus. Also, Jesus, as the incarnation of the Word or Spirit which spoke to Moses<sup>93</sup> would obviously bear a revelation superior to that brought by Moses<sup>94</sup>. The importance of this is that we see here clearly that the author and his community did not simply make use of any and every tradition which might conceivably support their case, but appealed to Scriptures and traditions which they, and in most cases their opponents as well, regarded as both authoritative and also relevant to the issue at hand.

vv12-13) This forms the central section of this passage, and although it cannot be said to be of central importance to the prologue, this should not be understood to mean that this section is of little significance. On the contrary, the idea of the righteous as children of God was of great significance in contemporary Jewish thought, as was the idea of Israel or the Israelites as God's son(s). Here the author is denying that natural birth or genealogical descent can make one a child of God<sup>95</sup>. We are thus once again in the presence of an emphatic assertion that being an Israelite without believing in God's messenger is of no value. Israel had frequently been punished because it failed to recognize God's messengers or appointed leaders for what they were<sup>96</sup>. In this central section, John warns his readers that even if one is an

"Word Became Flesh"; and my "Johannine Christianity". The arguments of Boismard (*op.cit.*, pp 121-126) against this conclusion are unconvincing.

<sup>91</sup> See Isa.11:2 (also the Targum to this verse and to Isa.42:1-4); 11Q13:17; Ps.Sol.17:37; 18:7; 1 Enoch 49.3; 66:2. There are also a number of passages in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, at least some of which may be pre-Christian. For Christian texts see the account of the Spirit's descent upon Jesus, present in all four Gospels, and further references such as Matt 12:28; Luke 4:14,18.

<sup>92</sup> A neuter pronoun is used here not to suggest that these were necessarily thought of as impersonal, but to avoid the (gender-specific and thus potentially offensive) pronouns 'he' and/or 'she'.

<sup>93</sup> See e.g. Targum Ps.-Jon. to Exod.33:16; Targum Neofiti and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Num.7:89.

<sup>94</sup> A point made unambiguously in v17.

<sup>95</sup> What is now generally termed as 'covenantal nomism' is in view here. In addition to E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London. SCM Press, 1977, see also Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Dallas: Word, 1988, pp.lxiv-lxxii.

<sup>96</sup> Moses was a particularly relevant example of such an instance, and throughout the first few centuries of Christian literature the fact that both Moses and Jesus were rejected by God's

Israelite, one must be alert, lest one fail to recognize God's chosen one and to respond in faith to him. There is a clear contrast implied between v11 and v12: those who are the Logos (and God's) 'own people' *should* be sons of God, but they have, as so often throughout their history, rejected the one whom God sent, thus showing themselves not to be God's children<sup>97</sup>.

### Conclusion: The Prologue in Johannine Legitimation

We have seen in our treatment of this section of the Fourth Gospel how a number of key motifs function, in the context of the prologue and of the Gospel as a whole, in ways that would be of great relevance to the proposed Johannine conflict situation, and it would scarcely be believable to suggest that all of these correspondences are accidental. Rather, we should regard the appearance of these motifs and emphases here as a key to understanding the whole Gospel. It has frequently been said that the author of the Fourth Gospel intends the whole of his book to be read in light of what is revealed to the reader in the prologue<sup>98</sup>, and this is surely true not only of its high christology, but also of its apologetic and polemical aims and intentions.

The prologue begins and ends with the Word alongside God. The fact that the Word is now incarnate in the man Jesus has certain implications which the author points out to his readers, both through explicit statements and through his use of parallelism and allusion. Jesus is worthy of his exalted status at the Father's right hand, because he is in fact none other than the Word who was with God in the beginning. As such, he is also able to function in the capacity of revealer in a manner which cannot be equaled by any other. Other figures, whether John the Baptist or Moses, cannot compare with the honour and status of an only Son<sup>99</sup>, nor can the written word of Torah compare with the Word who has now come 'in the flesh'. The failure of God's own people to accept the one whom he sent to them does not disprove Jesus' claims, since Israel had throughout its history rejected God's servants. Yet the few who believe, whether Israelites or not, are accepted by God, and their relationship with God as his children, made possible through

people, in spite of the signs which they did, was of great importance. See also Dale Allison, *The New Moses*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, pp.98-105.

<sup>97</sup> See also the similar argument in John 8:41-47.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. e.g. Hooker, *op.cit.*, p.51; Barrett, *op.cit.*, p.156

<sup>99</sup> Liddell and Scott note that the Greek term δόξα can mean both 'glory' in the sense of 'effulgence' or 'radiance', and also 'honour', 'reputation'. Although in the context of the manifestation of the one who is the Shekinah, the presence of God and the light, the former is obviously more relevant, 'honour' perhaps does better justice to the place of an only or beloved son in an ancient Mediterranean culture, although there is no English term which does justice to both meanings equally well. One may fruitfully compare the honour and dignity given to and value placed upon the paradigmatic μονογενὴς υἱός of the Hebrew Bible, Isaac, although this is not to suggest that the author of the Fourth Gospel intended to make an allusion to Isaac here

Jesus, validates his claims. The assertion that these were key issues for the Evangelist does not mean that the prologue is any less an exalted christological statement aimed at honouring and praising the incarnate and exalted Lord and the God whom he revealed. It is simply to point out that this appears to have been done in a context in which such christological statements and beliefs were controversial, and the author is thus concerned not only to state his christology, but also to defend it, and he does this by attempting to show the continuity of his beliefs with the authoritative traditions and Scriptures of the Jews and the Christians, as well as the culpability of 'the Jews' for failing to recognize who it was that had appeared among them, who it was whose glory they failed to see.

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